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ABSTRACT

This portraiture study of Amherst Regional Middle School, Amherst, Massachusetts, examined a case of shared and distributed leadership. The organizational changes at Amherst have fostered collaboration, new patterns of behavior, and changed expectations of what rigorous academic curriculum, new patterns of behavior, and changed expectations of what rigorous academic curriculum and assessment look like. This shared leadership has produced organizational success, which is seen as depending on the organization's ability to see things in new ways, gain new understandings, and produce new patterns of behavior (C. Argyris and D. Schon, 1996). This portraiture study provides a model of such organizational success and demonstrates the importance and interrelatedness of human and social capital in sustaining an environment of organizational learning. An attachment provides an outline of a consultancy session that reflects principles of organizational leadership. (Contains 2 figures and 32 references.) (SLD)

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Organizational Learning a Necessity for Sharing and Distributing Leadership to Bring about Real Change for Teachers and Students: One Principal's Story

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Abstract

This portraiture study of Amherst Regional Middle School examines a case of shared and distributed leadership. The organizational changes at Amherst have fostered collaboration, new patterns of behavior, and changed expectations of what rigorous academic curriculum and assessment looks like; shared leadership has produced organizational success. "Organizational success, however defined, is seen as depending on the organization's ability to see things in new ways, gain new understandings, and produce new patterns of behavior—all on a *continuing* basis and in a way that engages the organization as a *whole*" (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p. xix). This portraiture provides a model of such organizational success and demonstrates the importance and interrelatedness of human and social capital (Wolf, Borko, Elliott, and McIver, Summer 2000, Coleman, 1988) in sustaining an environment of organizational learning.

Organizational Learning a Necessity for Sharing and Distributing Leadership to Bring about Real Change for Teachers and Students: One Principal's Story

The purpose of this study is to examine a case of shared and distributed leadership. This study of organizational success has fostered collaboration, new patterns of behavior, and growth, rigorous academic standards and ways of assessing achievement for teachers and students, and increased parent involvement. "Organizational success, however defined, is seen as depending on the organization's ability to see things in new ways, gain new understandings, and produce new patterns of behavior—all on a *continuing* basis and in a way that engages the organization as a *whole"* (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p. xix). This portraiture study of Amherst Regional Middle School provides a model of such organizational success and demonstrates the importance and interrelatedness of human and social capital (Wolf, Borko, Elliott, and McIver, Summer 2000, Coleman, 1988) in sustaining an environment of organizational learning.

Historical Context—the Amherst Middle School Journey During the Tenure of Mary Cavalier, Principal, 1997-Present

When Mary Cavalier came to Amherst Regional Middle School (ARMS), it was a traditional, 7th 8th, and 9th grade junior high school under top-down leadership. The previous principal made procedural and operational decisions, and high school department chairs dictated the curriculum. Students were divided into six academic tracks, which in 1990 the NAACP alleged discriminated against minority students by placing a disproportionate number in lower tracks. These charges were substantiated by a state investigation, and the district was required to make changes and establish a monitoring committee (Bradley, 2000).

Cavalier was recruited to transition the school from a junior high to a middle school. Prior to her arrival the 9th grade was moved to the high school, which eased overcrowding and created a two-year middle school. She began focused on two objectives. The first was to get to know the faculty and community by gathering data about strengths and weaknesses, major issues, and individual's goals and visions for the school. Her second "was to be a teacher" (Cavalier in personal communication, June 24, 2002), to provide the school community with a fundamental understanding of the middle school philosophy and principles defined in *Turning Points* (The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), and in *This We Believe* (National Middle School Association, 1995).

When teachers returned in the fall of 1998, the majority were prepared for the new structures recommended for middle schools: 1) four-person integrated academic teams responsible for approximately 90, heterogeneously grouped students, 2) block scheduling that provides teachers with flexible academic periods and daily common planning time, and 3) an advisory program, 10-12 students that meet with an adult daily for 20-30 minutes to problem solve, socialize, and discuss adolescent issues. Everyone in the school is responsible for an advisory.

It was during the second year that ARMS applied for and received a three-year, $50,000 per year, Comprehensive School Reform Grant from the Department of Education in Massachusetts. The New England Regional Turning Points Network co-authored the grant, became the primary service provider, and supplied a coach to work with the school for three years. The primary roles of the coach were to help the school implement shared leadership through the establishment of a leadership team and to support teachers in implementing effective teams that focused common planning time on looking at student work and talking about teaching, learning, and assessment. "Cavalier's goal is for discussions of teaching and learning—rather than the myriad distractions and logistical issues that challenge teachers—to take center stage during planning time" (Bradley, October, 2000).

Cavalier came to ARMS with a comprehensive background and practical experience in effective teaching, learning, and assessment, effective middle school practices, and the concept of giving teachers autonomy. She had not had experience, or mentoring, in shared leadership and the process of working with a leadership team. Mary was, however, committed to a collaborative culture and had learned in her first year of data gathering that the ARMS staff was hard working, talented, highly intellectual, and willing to change. She also brought to the position the skill of being a "reflective practitioner" and what Schön (1987) refers to as an artist, "practitioners unusually adept a handling situations of uncertainty, uniqueness, and conflict" (p. 16). These conditions and qualities are important factors in understanding how she was able to lead the faculty at ARMS in transforming from a hierarchical junior high school focused on academic rigor for "some students" to a collaborative, demonstration Turning Points School that believes in high academic standards for all students, social justice, and a democratic society.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this study has several layers. Broadly, the process of change at ARMS is viewed through an organizational learning framework.

> Researchers of organizational change and practitioners argue that if schools are to successfully address today's challenges, a paradigm shift in the way they are viewed as organizations is needed. The paradigm shift called for is for schools to become "learning organizations"—expert at dealing with change as a normal part of work, not just in relation to the latest policy but also as a way of life (Senge, 1990; Mink, 1992; Marsh, 1997; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 1998; Watkins & Marsick, 1993)

More narrowly, the study focuses on two aspects of systems thinking:

- Seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains
- Seeing processes of change rather than specific moments in time (Kim, 1994; Sarason, 1996; Senge, 1990).

Through this conceptual frame the study will examine how Ms. Cavalier, the Amherst Regional Middle School leadership team, and subsequently the entire faculty created an effective middle school that embraces an organizational learning approach to school reform.

Methodology

As the Director of the New England Turning Points Network from 1997 to 2001 and the coach working with ARMS, two-three days per month, I bring to the study the biases of an insider. As a researcher and coach it is also important to maintain the distance of outsider. Although I can separate myself, my actions in working with the schools also impacts the change process. The model of organizational learning that emerges evolves from the collaborative interrelations between Mary, the faculty, and myself. While my multiple roles provide a rich opportunity to come to know the ARMS community in depth, it also means that I must straddle the world of insider and outsider. This position and my desire to examine the "goodness" in schools, aligns with Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's description of portraiture methodology.

> The alternative that portraiture provides raises a reflective glass to the stories that shape lives, pedagogy, and institutions. In so doing, portraiture illuminates and acknowledges the importance of these phenomena. The close observation that portrait writing requires unites the researcher to the subject—like the artist assuming the pose of the model—and affords a view of the parts of the whole that insiders know intimately.
>
> The distance that portrait writing requires affords a view of the whole with which insiders may be less familiar. The portraitist works from the vantage point at which goodness can be apprehended—even as it is marked by mistakes and failure. A subject struggling for success may not have time on her own for the luxury of recognition of achievement or the perspective of situating struggle within a larger construct. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p.36)

This methodology allows for capturing the story as a distant observer and negotiating an authentic and significant narrative of the school's process of change. Portraiture provides a collaborative method of inquiry between the researcher and the subject that blends "aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xv). While the relationship through Turning Points meant that teachers, administrators, and I, the coach, collaborated on interpretation of the school's data and the work initiated from the data, the analysis of the interrelationships that exist in the school and of the process of change over time are mine.

My desire in studying schools is to write about what is good, what gives promise of working, and then look at why. There is evidence of "goodness" in the leadership at ARMS, laced, as always, with imperfections (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis, 1997). Portraits by their very nature capture light and dark, strength and vulnerability, "and how people, cultures, and organizations negotiate those extremes in an effort to establish the precarious balance between them are central to the expression of goodness" (p. 9).

As a coach at ARMS, portraiture provides an opportunity to paint a multi-layered perspective of a school engaged in the process of reform. The fact that this is a case study of one restricts the generalizations that can be drawn from it. However, the depth of the data gathered over time and the variety of sources used should allow those interested in thinking about shared leadership in

an organizational learning framework to draw their own conclusions and identify questions for future research.

This study replicates the theoretical framework and unit of analysis used in, *Sustainable Results in Urban Middle Schools: How Principals Use Systems Thinking to Lead Effective Change* (Burke, P.H. 2000, unpublished dissertation). It explores the principal's ability at conceptualization, aspiration, and reflection—capabilities called for in leading learning organizations.

1. Conceptualizations: the ability to visualize the whole and the interrelationship of the parts, and then to articulate and formulate that picture in public, testable ways;
2. Aspiration: the ability of individuals, teams, and schools to be clear about the results they want, and truly care about, and to change because it is what they want not because they have to
3. Reflection: the ability to reflect on deep assumptions and patterns of behavior, both individually and collectively, and to have dialogue, open conversations, about those reflections (Bohm, 1990; Schön, 1983; Schön, 1987; Senge, 1990; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1991).

Although Amherst is a very different setting than the four urban schools examined in the dissertation, Mary Cavalier was selected for this study because of here commitment to the seven principles of Turning Points and because from the beginning of our work together she indicated her desire to engage in shared leadership. The seven Turning Points principles are:

- Create small caring communities for learning
- Teach a core academic program
- Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions
- Prepare teachers for the middle grades
- Develop students' character, creativity, and health
- Re-engage families in the education of young adolescents
- Connect schools and communities (Jackson & Davis, Turning Points 2000, 2000).

As with the four principals in the dissertation, Mary talked about the big picture and the need to implement the model with high fidelity. The school would also participate in the Center for Prevention Research and Development self-study survey, which is incorporated into the school reform work of Turning Points. This survey provides a comprehensive set of data about the school regarding climate, attitudes, classroom practices, instructional strategies, and family-school communication. It is completed by all staff and all students and completed every other year.

Methods and Modes of Inquiry and Sources of Evidence

Data for this project was gathered from several formal dialogues with Ms. Cavalier, observation and informal conversations with the leadership team, academic teams, informal groups, inquiry or study groups, and individuals. Other sources of data include:

- Formal coaching reports
- Personal notes taken during meetings and journals written after meetings
- Participation in a three-day site visit by the National Turning Points Network to affirm the school as a demonstration school and the Affirmation Final Report

- School portfolios prepared by the school for the site visit
- Interviews with students
- Data from the Self-Study Survey, taken every other year
- Newspaper accounts
- State reports
- School Improvement Plans
- School generated reports

The interviews with Mary were shaped more through open dialogue than through structured questions. Areas discussed included:

- Her portrait of the school
- Learning organization (I defined a learning organization as, "a group of people pursuing common purposes (individual purposes as well) with a collective commitment to regularly weighing the value of those purposes, modifying them when that makes sense, and continuously developing more effective and efficient ways of accomplishing those purposes (Leithwood and Aitken, in press, p. 63).
- School culture
- Reflective process
- Vision
- Engaging the staff in reflection and inquiry about beliefs, assumptions, and current patterns of behavior
- Finding time for personal reflection
- Change process
- External conditions
- Strategies for overcoming barriers

Emerging Themes on Shared Leadership

Margaret Wheatley in A Simpler Way (1996) refers to the schizophrenic nature of organizations and a lack of integrity with core guiding ideas. It is the core guiding ideas that provide the creative approach in learning organization theory to conceptualizing the ideal. Clarity about the core guiding ideas facilitates the organization's leaders use systems thinking to design organizational change so that it produces the vision naturally. Mary's clarity about her core purpose did provide the creative energy to conceptualize the ideal for the faculty. She realized, however, that the vision would only thrive if everyone shared and owned the same core purpose. She recognized that she would first need to let them know through conversation, recognition of their work, and her behavior toward all staff, students, and parents that she respected whom each of them was individually.

The conversations with Mary reveal the vision she brought to ARMS and her awareness that to share it she would need to talk about it and model it. Mary's vision is based on the principles of Turning Points and that schools must balance the core beliefs of equity and excellence so that every child is able to achieve high academic standards. In her first year of data gathering and teaching, she used many strategies to engage the faculty. Mary had the staff recall their own adolescence, she recognized their talent, and she shared the philosophy of Turning Points. "I needed the teachers to trust that we were in this together for the same core purpose. I was establishing a base in that first year around my vision, which was to make school work for every

student" (Cavalier in personal communication, June, 2001). The core of an organization evolves from how its members think and interact, "thus, the primary leverage for any organizational learning effort lies not in policies, budgets, or organizational charts, but in ourselves" (Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, and Kleiner, 1994). This premise is the foundation, upon which Mary Cavalier led the transition that took Amherst from a traditional junior high school that provided a solid education for the top 10 to 20% of the students to a model middle school that seeks to educate every student to a high standard.

Staff participation and acceptance of the vision ranged from enthusiastic avid supporters who already shared the dream to skeptics, or cautious "show me" converts, to strong resistors who were more comfortable in the traditional top down junior high school model. Mary also recognized the importance of sharing with parents, students, and district personnel. Through dialogue and modeling Mary made her vision clear and continued to invite others into the process of shaping the specifics of the vision.

> In the spring of that first year I watched a strong and fine science teacher make a real shift in his thinking about his work with all of our kids. He had sent a particularly challenging eight-grade girl to the office for clearly being disrespectful. As I met with her, she came to acknowledge that she was off base and having a very hard day. I suggested that we return to the classroom and she share with her teacher the insight she had had with me. She did so, apologizing in eighth grade girl style, for being way out of line, and she was welcomed back into the classroom.
>
> The next morning the following note appeared in my mailbox from the science teacher, "I am beginning to understand that there are no longer throwaway children in our building, that it is our job to build relationships with all of our students and that you are here to help. Thank you." He then shared a quote with me from *A River Runs Through It,* "Sometimes it is wonderful to sit back and quietly watch yourself becoming the author of something beautiful"
>
> I realized that my role was to teach by modeling and assisting as we made the shifts in our paradigms to a student centered culture. In addition, my role was to facilitate problem finding by helping to gather and interpret data. If the faculty and I were defining the problems together, then I would be moving toward another core belief that we are in this together. The big problem that we surfaced and which in turn shaped our shared vision was that our job was to figure out how to make school work for every student. (Burke & Cavalier, in press)

What began to emerge in her first year were three themes of shared leadership:

- Trust.
- Open Dialogue and open doors.
- Emphasis on Relationships

In the second and third year as teams began to assume ownership of their time and curriculum, and as a representative leadership team was formed additional themes of shared leadership became apparent. These include:

- Collaboration
- Acceptance of disagreements
- Consensus as a process for making decisions
- Commitment to work from data
- Continuous learning

Initiating Shared Leadership

One of the seven Turning Points principles is to "empower teachers and administrators to make decisions." The first step in this direction was to provide teams with common instructional time and give them the freedom to make decisions about how they used this time while still meeting State and District expectations for required instructional minutes. The second step was to implement a representative leadership team.

The National Turning Points Network provides the following description of the Leadership Team:

> The leadership team coordinates the school's efforts as its members gather information, guide the vision-making process, and communicate the school's progress to all members of the school community. In a Turning Points school, the leadership team takes the central role of leading the change process that a school undergoes while ensuring that the faculty and staff are an integral part of all change. (Turning Points, 1999, p. 11)

Although the representatives to the leadership team needed to be identified by the various teams within the school, Mary also knew key people that she needed to have on this first leadership team.

> I personally encouraged official and unofficial school leaders to "volunteer" to be the team representative for the first leadership team. This included teachers who were enthusiastic about the core concepts of the middle school model, and teachers who were skeptics or staunch supporters of a departmentalized "junior high." In addition to the fact that they all had influence on a segment of the faculty, they all were also excellent teachers committed to high achievement for students.
>
> I knew that if we were going to move the entire faculty, I needed to have all voices at the table. Our first leadership team was a strong, diverse, highly visible group of thoughtful educators. They all took the role seriously and although some were more dubious about what "shared" leadership would look like in reality, they were all willing to allow it to unfold. (Personal Communication. August 2002)

The Turning Points Coach's role was to help Mary with organizing the agenda for the first meetings and model facilitating the meeting for approximately six months. The coach's facilitation helped to provide the team with space and time to reflect-what did each member really want to create by having shared decision-making, to inquire-what did other members want to create by having shared decision-making, and to become comfortable with her/his role in shared leadership (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Senge, et al, 1994). It was not until spring at the end

of Mary's second year that the leadership team began to have in-depth dialogue (Bohm, 1990) about the role of the leadership team, the term of office, how decisions would be made, and what conversations and decisions should be on the leadership team's agenda. Three key elements were in place when these decisions needed to be made: 1) The majority of the leadership-team members were clearly invested in "inquiry and advocacy" (Senge et al., 1994, p.256); 2) A sense of trust in each member's commitment to students was present; and 3) Mary understood and was willing to put issues on the table for decisions by the leadership team, even if the final decision differed from what she originally advocated.

The fall of the third year followed a summer of intense curricular work by several of the teams. One of these teams decided that they would like to further integrate the content and that they would pilot an exhibition. This was another part of developing rigorous content that Mary Cavalier understood well. Once again she provided opportunities for teachers to observe exemplars, and she provided the resources of time, money, and an environment that encouraged risk-taking. The coach worked with the team in the summer, which also provided the coach with increased credibility with the teachers. This was going to be an important element in the continued growth and development of the leadership team.

> While I knew that I could help the team do the curriculum work, I recognized that the coach also understood integrating curriculum and exhibitions. Letting go of work that I thoroughly enjoy was at first difficult. It meant letting go of control. It also meant letting teachers have more independence and decision-making autonomy. However, I had come to trust the coach and believe that we shared a common vision about the dual importance of excellence and equity in an exemplary middle school.
>
> The team that the coach worked with in the summer had an outstanding first exhibition in late October. Everyone in the school saw all students engaged in the work. During the three intense days of preparation for the first exhibition, students were working in self-directed teams peer editing the written part of the presentations and peer coaching the oral presentations. Other teachers walking past the room were amazed to see the student engagement. Teachers also recognized that it was not just the traditional "A" students that were being successful; all students, including bilingual students, were reaching mastery. In fact, 100% of the students on the team were successful, once again beginning the paradigm shift to success for every student in our school. I asked the team piloting the exhibitions to let no child fail at this critical work. One student came to me the day before exhibition, at the request of the team, and received a strong and respectful message from me that he would, in fact, be presenting his information at the exhibitions to be held the following day. He hurried back upstairs to get ready, knowing that the entire school community meant it, that no child would fail.
>
> This success leveraged two critical elements in moving closer to the vision of a high-performing middle school. First, teachers now had a more concrete picture of was meant by saying that the main purpose for a Turning Points school was excellence and equity for all students. Second, the coach was now seen as a resource whose vision was aligned with mine. (Personal Communication, Spring 1999)

At the first leadership team meeting in the fall, the coach reviewed the norms developed in the first year and the importance of consensus. She stressed the significance of one's right to ask that the group continue processing an issue until all felt that they could at least live with the decision.

The coach also used with the team some additional tools for creating an environment that supported dialogue, and collaborative problem solving. Dialogue, as defined by David Bohm (1990) and Senge, et al., (1994), is conversation that opens up the process of inquiry. Participants share perspectives in an environment that reveals thought process and feelings. The goal is not to advocate but to develop an understanding of each person's point of view. Two tools were "Ladder of Inference" (Argyris, 1990, p.87) and the "Consultancy Protocol" (Turning Points, 1999). (See appendix)

The Ladder of inference describes the mental pathway from observable data and experiences to decisions and actions. According to Argyris (1990), many conversations occur at the assumption stage after each participant has already selected data based on his/her underlying beliefs and added his/her own meaning to the data. When a group is carrying on a dialogue at the assumption level, then frequently each party is using different data.

The leadership team became more important during the third year as most of the faculty began to delve into real issues around teaching and learning. The role of the coach in helping the leadership team define its work and take the risks to do the work was crucial. The team deepened their shared understanding of the their core purpose. One major issue that came to a head toward the end of the third year demonstrates the shift in thinking and dialogue that was occurring at the school.

> As we continued to look for ways to continue to help all students reach high standards, we realized that as important as our music program was (approximately 65% of the students participate in band, orchestra, or chorus.) it was difficult to justify having students participate in two music classes a day at least one quarter of the year. [One of the special subjects was classroom music.] We still had too many students who struggled with reading comprehension in the content areas and with being able to communicate effectively in writing and speaking. All three of these are standards that middle school students should be able to meet when they leave eighth grade. I brought to the leadership team a recommendation to implement a new teaching position in our integrated studies courses. This teacher would work with each eighth grade team for one quarter to support reading comprehension and implementing exhibitions, which exemplify critical thinking and effective communication skills. The coach helped us work through the process of making this decision. As demonstrated in the systems diagram (Fig. 1), this was a new innovation and that meant that there would be implications to other parts of the school system. The most obvious implication was that we would eliminate the second music elective.
>
> Because of our shared communication structure, every team had time to discuss the issue prior to the leadership team meeting. I had been the leadership team member to put this on the agenda, so I described the proposal at the meeting. One of the first responses was that this decision should not be made at the leadership team level, but rather was a decision for the principal and superintendent. After a brief back and forth debate, the coach intervened in

our discussion and helped us use the Ladder of Inference and look at more data. One piece of information that surfaced was that several representatives and teams had assumed that this was a personnel decision, that a music teacher would have a reduction in position because of this decision. Our opening discussion was not occurring at the data level but at the assumption level of the ladder. I clarified that this was not a personnel decision and that no current staff would lose their job if we decided to create the new position. Rather, we would be teaching classroom music in an alternative way.

The coach also reminded the leadership team that if they decided not to take the responsibility of making this decision, but to give it back to the Principal and the Superintendent, then they were abdicating their right to help make decisions about teaching and learning for the middle school.

This comment caused everyone on the leadership team to pause. It was clear that many had not thought through the many layers that create shared leadership. While I have to give away decisions that might be less time consuming to make on my own or with just a few teachers' input, faculty must also take on the responsibility of making difficult choices.

There were several faculty members that voted "no" on changing the elective, but they also asked for more information and an opportunity to go back and discuss it with their teams. The coach suggested that the Music Director and I, as representatives of both sides of the issue, use a Consultancy Protocol at the next meeting to help present all of the information.

The Consultancy Protocol is a structured communication process for solving problems. While usually only one person presents the problem, the Music Director and I both presented the issue, faculty then had an opportunity to ask questions for clarification and open-ended questions that might expand our thinking about the problem. After the questioning, the other members of the leadership team had a conversation about the issue while the Music Director and I listened. This structure took the two extremes out of the conversation and allowed the other faculty members to identify pros and cons. Meanwhile, the Music Director and I listened and took notes.

At the end of this meeting we still were not ready to vote, but everyone was beginning to feel that they had a more comprehensive picture of the whole. We had begun to move the decision away from being personal to looking at long-term benefits for every student and to thinking systemically about the impact on the community as a whole.

It was the process of working through this issue that fully developed and clarified our understanding of shared leadership. It took approximately four months before we decided to add this additional exploratory teacher to the eighth grade curriculum, and, in fact, in making the decision we reached a position of compromise. But once the decision was made the entire faculty was supportive of the decision and I knew that the teacher in the position would be successful because there would not be faculty trying to sabotage a decision they did not support. (Personal communication with Cavalier, Spring 2000).

During Mary's fourth year as principal, the Amherst Regional Middle School became the first school to go through the National Turning Points affirmation process. A team of outside observers, which included a principal, coaches from two other regional Turning Points Networks, and the National Director of Turning Points, would spend several days at the school. They would be in classrooms, at a leadership team meeting, and look at documented evidence to determine whether the school was moving toward creating a caring community of learners, dedicated to equity and excellence, and committed to creating a culture in which every member has the opportunity to reach high levels of achievement and success. In addition the outside observer would identify specific areas that were exemplary and areas of challenge.

One area identified as outstanding was the criteria of shared leadership. The final report stated:

> In the area of leadership capacity and a professional collaborative culture the school received a solid Phase III. [Phase III is the highest rating] The leadership team distributes an agenda, printed on a template articulating the principles of Turning Points, a week prior to the meeting so that there is time for faculty input to representatives. Minutes also are distributed within days of the meeting to the entire faculty.
>
> The decision making process used in the leadership team demonstrates a commitment to a democratic school community. (Amherst Final Report, February 2001)

The school had embraced change and recognized that they were teaching, learning, and assessing in a very different way than when Mary Cavalier had first come to Amherst Regional Middle School. They also had come to understand that from a systems perspective change is constant and they would need to continue to gather data, analyze the data, and use data to drive decisions that would continue to ensure every student was being asked to achieve at a high academic level, but that they also had the structures to support their reaching the goal.

> We also realized that as our external coach prepared to leave that we would need to have internal people who could facilitate in the same role. We would need someone who would support teams in looking at student work, help with problem solving, support the exhibitions, and continue to be an objective observer at the leadership team meeting. Although the National Turning Points final report had given us a rating of excellent, we also knew that we would need to continue to monitor the process and to improve our work. There were going to be other difficult decisions to be made and it would be helpful to have an outside voice that helped us to pursue dialogue prior to decision making. The leadership team agreed that this role would be more difficult for an internal person, than it had been for the external coach. We decided to install three internal coaches. (Personal communication, Spring 2000)

Lessons Learned

Amherst is a community that has shifted their paradigm about interrelationships in the organization and the process of change. Teachers and administrators see the interrelatedness of their behaviors over time and recognize that they operate in a causal loop relationship that at times is reinforcing and at other times balancing. They are coming to recognize the

interrelationships of the organization are dependent on human capital (knowledge and skills) and social capital (interactions and patterns of behavior) (Wolf, et al. 2000). They are learning to watch for patterns, expect delays as new initiatives are introduced, and trust that they share a common core purpose.

The affirmation was three years ago and the Amherst Regional Middle School has continued to thrive. Leadership is at the individual level for students and teachers, at the team level, in study groups, and at the whole school level in the leadership team. Mary Cavalier continues to serve the critical role as the keeper of the vision. She never forgets the core purpose of the school, to ensure that every child is able to achieve at a high academic level in a caring, supportive community of learners. Through her thoughtful implementation of shared leadership she, the faculty, the students, and the community at large have created a "learning organization."

Together, they have created a living, interrelated, self-renewing organism that understands the need for changing their approach for reforming and restructuring schools (Gardner, 1981; Wheatley, 1992). Studies in business and in education identify organizations that support this kind of change as ones that are characterized by flexibility, adaptability, collaboration, creativity, and the ability to continuously learn and change (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hargraves, 1995). They are referred to as "learning organizations." Learning organizations are adaptable and flexible, are inclined toward experimentation, are ready to rethink means and ends, are oriented towards inquiry, and recognize the human potential for learning on behalf of the organization (Argyris and Schön, 1996).

The Amherst faculty recognizes that teaching can no longer be viewed as a "routine job conducted with craft-like knowledge, in isolation from other adults, in a hierarchical status structure. The new perception of teaching, in contrast, views it as a non-routine activity drawing on a reliable body of technical knowledge and conducted in collaboration with other professional colleagues" (Leithwood, et al., 1994, p. 126).

The professionalism of teaching supports the importance of an expanded foundation of pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogical-content knowledge (Clandinin, 1985; Elbaz, 1981; Shulman, 1987). "Thus the meaning of change for the future does not simply involve implementing single innovations effectively. It means a radical change in the culture of schools and the conception of teaching as a profession" (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 142).

While one cannot predict the future of schools, what is evident at Amherst is that the vision is not Mary's alone. It has become embedded in the culture of the school and is shared by all. When Mary at some point leaves Amherst Regional Middle School, the vision will not go with her. Just as the school was able to sustain the role of the coach they will also sustain their belief that teaching is a non-routine activity that needs a collaborative, democratic environment.

Implications and Significance for Educational Reform

There is a significant body of research on leadership and leadership preparation (Burke, 2002; Rost, 1993), but little research has been done on how principals share and distribute leadership. Therefore, this is an important "telling case" that will add to our understanding of this critical dimension of leadership. The leadership evident in Amherst does not represent "a bundle of traits" as implied by the dictionary definition, "ability to lead," or imply that leadership "involves little more than occupying a position of management or administration" (Rost. 1993, p. 43). Leadership has been nurtured and developed in Amherst. First, by Cavalier's own growth through personal mastery, her ability to conceptualize her vision and engage in personal reflection; second, by the "process of cultivating vision and engaging participation through reciprocal influence between leaders and constituents in which they collectively create real changes for mutual purposes" (Burke, 2002, p. 161). Understanding how to foster this type of leadership is critical for achieving sustainable results in school reform.

"The current shifts in demographics and rapid changes in technology and information indicate that future principals will only experience more uncertainty and divergent beliefs about the purpose of school, which argues for teaching them how to think systemically" (Burke, 2002, p. 305). This case indicates the types of opportunities and knowledge base that preparation programs need to provide for nascent principals and school districts for current principals.

There is significant evidence that shared and distributed leadership, democratic collaboration and professionalism has changed how administrators, teachers, students, and parents think, behave, and interact at Amherst Regional Middle School. Specific results for students include:

- De-tracking for all students in all subjects.
- Exhibition by each 8th grade student to demonstrate his/her ability to write, think, question, conduct research, and speak.
- Increased achievement for all students as demonstrated through the state standardized test, district tests, exhibitions, and portfolios.
- Expanded academic support and enrichment activities for all students.
- Suspension rates have dropped from over 60 students during Mary's first year at the middle school to less than 20 in 2002.
- There has been a corresponding increase in attendance rates.
- The list of students receiving D's and F's has declined significantly as well (2002 school records).

Teaching and learning are now the topics of dialogue at a majority of common planning time meetings, a noteworthy shift from the focus on student problems that was predominant in the beginning of Mary's tenure. The dialogue among students is changing as well, with conversations about achievement and learning an important part of the school life of students. At the end of the third year, one team held exhibitions where each students was required to independently present their individual research and be able to demonstrate several component of critical thinking: questioning, using prior knowledge, analyzing, synthesizing, and drawing inferences. At the end of the fourth year several teams were involved in similar exhibitions, which asked students to publicly explain their work, both written and oral, and defend their conclusions. This year all eight teams at the school will ask their students to participate in

exhibition, demonstration of deep, connected understanding. "There is a distinct atmosphere of shared serious purpose in the school, with students and staff clearly committed to common goals of learning" (Personal communication with Mary Cavalier, December 2002).

Implications for Preparing and Supporting Principals

Implications for teacher/administrator preparation.

Prior to coming to Amherst, Mary had taught in a magnet school based on the Coalition of Essential Schools whole school reform model, a model similar in its focus to the Turning Points model. She had a vivid mental model of an effective, democratic middle school, which expected high achievement for every student. She also received her administrative training at Bank Street College of Education. Bank Street College of Education has been a leader in child-centered education for more than eighty years. Its mission "is to discover the environments in which children grow and learn to their full potential, and to educate teachers and others to create these environments" (www.bnkst.edu).

However, many institutions continue to educate teachers and principals in a hierarchical model. It is then this the mental model that they will teach and lead from. For future educators to be able to create environments where students can grow and learn to their full potential, in their preparation they will need to experience such an environment. They will need to participate in a democratic education, one where they have a say in the curriculum, how they will demonstrate their understanding, and how they learn best.

College professors also will need to engage future teachers and administrators in dialogue with other students and faculty about their work and their vision of what excellence looks like. Through dialogue and tools such as the Ladder of Inference (Argyris & Schön, 1996) while still students these future leaders will learn to look for data rather than discuss from assumptions and beliefs. As students, they will need to learn to reflect on their own learning and to engage in structured conversations with others as they look at their own practice. Through tools such as the Consultancy Protocol future educators will come to look at learning as an ongoing process of change rather than a specific moment in time for a single test. Such goals have significant implications about the structure of college instruction and preparation.

College professors also need to model and work with students to develop an understanding about interrelationships. Students need opportunities to see the interrelationships of different academic departments and to develop a deeper understanding of how systems are interrelated and how those interrelationships impact. Change at any level will have outcomes often extended over time and not apparent at the moment. In other words we need to change from a more traditional model of linear-cause-and-effect to seeing organizations interconnected relationships.

Implications at the district level.

The experience at Amherst also has implications for the school district. The Superintendent at the time Mary arrived in Amherst was not a dynamic or visionary leader, but he was willing to provide Mary with the freedom and financial support to implement the new structures. Amherst is also a small district, with only one regional middle school and one high school. It is more challenging when we look at this similar model in urban schools (Burke, 2000).

Within an urban district 20-40% of the students change schools within the district during the school year, which causes superintendents striving to ensure that "no child is left behind," to mandate district curriculum, to develop more standardized district tests, to impose specific expectations on schools, which in turn means that schools have little discretion over the budget, time, or shared goals. Such external control diminishes the belief on the part of teachers and principals that they have a voice in setting the core purpose of the school (Burke, 2000).

However, superintendents with district administrators, principals, teachers, and parents can work collaboratively to clarify a broad shared vision. As with the leadership team at Amherst, when all members of the community are represented in setting the vision, then they will be more likely to implement the vision. Once a more global vision is set, principals need autonomy over their own budget, staffing, and curricular planning in order to work with their faculty and community to create a school-based vision that serves the unique culture of the school but aligns with the district vision. Urban schools can no longer simply accept that the size and complexity of their district allows them to step back in their leadership.

The Amherst model indicates that a democratic school with collaborative leadership and shared decision making is more likely to create a student-centered environment where students and teachers can grow and learn together. If we want other schools to achieve similar results, then large urban districts, small urban districts, and rural districts will need to shift their mental construct of school and provide each school in the system with more autonomy and a clear vision that has been developed collaboratively of where they are going.

Implications for research-based reform models.

Whole-school researched-based reform models also have an opportunity to provide support. Through network structures, reform models can provide the modeling, professional development, time, and space for like-minded schools to meet and formulate a common vision of teaching, learning, and assessment. The "coaches" can model conceptualization, dialogue, and reflection; they can help schools learn to use data and to reflect on their work. As an outsider, the coach can help mirror the dialogue and ensure that everyone is focusing on the bigger picture. With the commitment at the district level and external support from research-based reform models each school community can develop a rigorous and relevant curriculum collectively. Each school can engage in creating a "learning organization" that is able to continuously learn and change to meet the ever-changing needs of young adolescents.

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Appendix

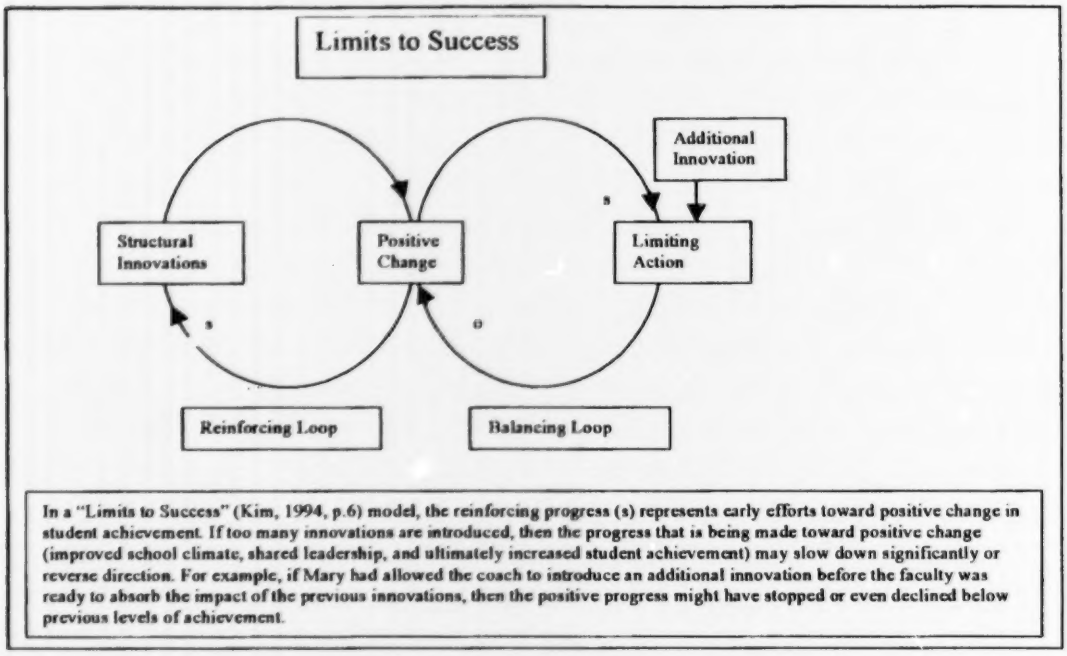
Limits to Success
Additional Innovation
Structural Innovations
Positive Change
Limiting Action
s
s
o
Reinforcing Loop
Balancing Loop
In a "Limits to Success" (Kim, 1994, p.6) model, the reinforcing progress (s) represents early efforts toward positive change in student achievement. If too many innovations are introduced, then the progress that is being made toward positive change (improved school climate, shared leadership, and ultimately increased student achievement) may slow down significantly or reverse direction. For example, if Mary had allowed the coach to introduce an additional innovation before the faculty was ready to absorb the impact of the previous innovations, then the positive progress might have stopped or even declined below previous levels of achievement.

Figure 1. Systems thinking archetype to demonstrate the influence of structural innovations on the school system.

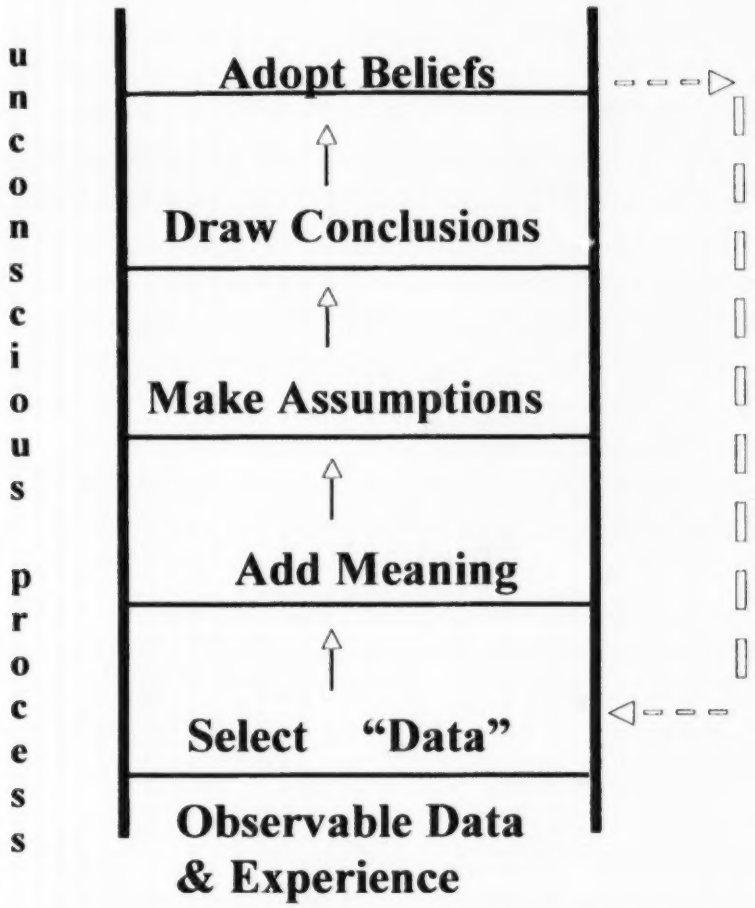

Figure 2 Ladder of Inference. Model explains how individual's beliefs shape the data we observe or experience, select data for processing, add meaning to the data, draw conclusions from the data, and either confirm our current beliefs or change our beliefs so that we begin to see other data.

CONSULTANCY

TIME: Approximately one hour

ROLES: Presenter (person whose work is being discussed by the group)
Facilitator (person who also participates)

PROCEDURE:

1. **Presenter gives a quick overview of their work.** **5 minutes**

Presenter highlights the major issues or problems with which his/her school is struggling, and frames a question for the Consultancy group to consider. Their framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenters' reflection on the work and/or issues being discussed, are key features of this protocol.

2. **Consultancy group asks clarifying questions** **5 minutes**

Clarifying questions are questions that have brief, factual answers.

3. **Consultancy group reviews what they think they heard** **10 minutes**

Each member of the consultancy group gives a two or three sentence review of what he/she heard the presenter say. The consultant may summarize the issue or problem or identify one particular point that he/she heard and feels is important to restate so as to probe the presenter's thinking.

4. **Consultancy group talks with each other & presenter listens** **15 minutes**

The group talks with each other about the work and issues presented. What did they hear? What didn't they hear that they needed to know more about? What do they think about the questions and issues presented? The conversation should include both "warm" and "cool" comments. The presenter is not allowed to speak during this discussion, but instead listens and takes notes.

5. **Presenter responds & consultancy group listens** **10 minutes**

6. **Facilitator leads a shared conversation** **10 minutes**

7. **Facilitator leads a brief conversation about the group's observations of the process.** **5 minutes**

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